

PHIL 220 – Philosophy of Religion

Spring 2022

Instructor: Dr. Victor Saenz

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Tues/Thurs 2:30pm - 3:45pm

Office Hours: By appointment at Brochstein Pavillion. *Shoot me an email with four or so dates and times that work for you within a week of your email and we'll take it from there.*

Major monotheistic religions make substantive claims about God, human beings, and the meaning of life. They classically hold, for example, that God exists and is almighty, all-knowing, and all good. Or they claim that the clear existence of radical evil and suffering do not give us reasons to deny God's existence or benevolent providence. Or we are told that any contradiction between faith and reason, between religion and science, is merely apparent. Or it is taught that God is the ultimate source of moral authority and should be the supreme object of our devotion; that we should love others as we love ourselves and out of love for God.

The aim of this course is to bring some of the best of philosophical reflection to bear on claims such as these. Does philosophical reason help vindicate or cast serious doubt on these claims? Arguments on various sides will be presented fair-mindedly. Students will be given the tools to articulate and evaluate several perspectives on these issues, including how they apply to their own lives.

The course is divided into five units:

1. **Arguments for God's Existence (+Objections)**
2. **Suffering as an Objection to God's Existence**
3. **Divine Attributes: Why All-powerful, All-knowing, and All-good?**
4. **On the Nature of Religious Belief and Commitment**
5. **God, Ethics, and the Meaning of Life: Secular and Theistic Approaches**

All readings will be made available on Canvas. There are no required texts.

Learning Goals

1. To learn some of the major arguments in central problems of the philosophy of religion (content)
2. To improve the ability to critically and actively read major work in the philosophy of religion (skill)
3. To grow in the ability to make philosophical arguments and pose philosophical questions, both verbally and in writing (skill)
4. To become more proficient in productively engaging viewpoints quite different from your own (attitude)

Requirements

Office Hours Mtg	5
Weekly Writing	15
Exam 1	15
Exam 2	15
Paper 1	20
Paper 2	20
Personal Reflection 1	5
Personal Reflection 2	5
	100

Office Hours Mtg. You should schedule an office-hours meeting with me before the mid-semester break. When we meet, tell me you're intending to meet this requirement.

Weekly Writing. Every week you will be asked to do a short writing exercise responding to the reading that week.

Exams. There will be two exams on the first and second half of the semester, respectively.

Short papers. You will be required to write two short papers throughout the semester. I will give you more information about prompts and expectations. Late papers will not be accepted without penalty if without an official excuse. All late assignments will be penalized a third of a letter-grade per day, including weekends.

Reflection Papers. At two points in the semester, you will be required to write very short reflection assignments. The goal of the assignments will be to help you reflect upon what you have learned and how this applies to your own life.

Classroom decorum

We will be exploring a wide range of views in this class. I don't expect you to agree with the central theses of all the views on offer. (In fact, I don't think you can do so consistently!) It is perfectly fine to disagree with the authors or with your peers—in fact, disagreement is expected. However, it is of tremendous importance to listen carefully to the view that an author or student is putting forth and to try to understand the reasons or arguments that support this view. When/if you do respond to people you disagree with, you must always do this in a way that is respectful. When you object, always criticize the reasoning—not the people—behind views.

Honor code

The honor code applies to all work assigned for this course. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. While it is expected and hoped that you will discuss the issues in the course with other students both in and

out of class, *all written work you turn in must be your own*. Passages taken from another source must be *explicitly quoted and cited*. Any questions you have about what constitutes plagiarism should be addressed to the instructor prior to handing in your written assignments.

Disabilities

If you have a documented disability that will impact your work in this class, please contact me to discuss your needs. Additionally, you will need to register with Disability Support Services Office in the Allen Center.

The syllabus is only a guide and is subject to change. All participants will be notified of changes in a timely manner.

Unit 1: God's existence - Some Cosmological Arguments & Objections | The Principle of Sufficient Reason

Week 1

Tues. 1/11 – Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion; Logic, Arguments

Thurs 1/13 – William Rowe, “The Cosmological Argument” (Arguments for God's existence)

Week 2

Tues 1/18 – Graham Oppy, “Does the Universe have a Cause?”

J.L. Mackie, from “Cosmological Arguments,” in *The Miracle of Theism* (Some objections)

“How to Read Philosophy” Assignment

Thurs 1/20– Alexander Pruss on the Principle of Sufficient Reason (Must every contingent fact have a cause?)

Week 3

Tues 1/25 William Lane Craig, “The Kalam Cosmological Argument” (Another cosmological argument for God's existence)

Thurs 1/27– Wes Morrison, “A Critical Examination of the Kalam Cosmological Argument”

Unit 2: Suffering and Divine Hiddenness as Reasons for Atheism? Objections & Replies

Week 4

Tues 2/1 – J.L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence” Aquinas, from *Summa Theologiae* “On what Almighty God (*Deus Omnipotens*) Cannot Do” (**Release Paper 1 Prompt**)

Thurs 2/3 – William Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism”

Week 5

Tues 2/8 – J.L. Schellenberg, “Divine Hiddenness Justifies Atheism”

Thurs 2/10 – Alvin Plantinga, The Free Will Response

Week 6

Tues 2/15 – Eleonore Stump, “The Problem of Evil” (**Reflection Paper Prompt Released**)

Thurs 2/17 – Michael Murray, “Deus Absconditus” (**Paper 1 Due**)

Unit 3: Divine Attributes

Week 7

Tues 2/22 – Aquinas on Divine Attributes: Why think God is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good, etc.? (**Reflection Paper 1 Due; Mid-term Questions Released**)

Thurs 2/24 – Stump on God’s Eternity & Simplicity

Week 8

Tues 3/1 – William Rowe, God would be forced to create the best world; this is not the best world, so there is no God

Thurs 3/3 - David Wierenga, God is not forced to create at all

Week 9

Tues 3/8 – TBD (**Mid-term Due**)

Thurs 3/10 – TBD

3/13 – 3/20: SPRING BREAK

Unit 4: The Nature of Religious Belief - Faith | Evidence-Seeking | Belief in God as Properly Basic | The Presumption of Atheism

Week 10

Tues 3/22 – Lara Buschak, “When is faith rational?”

Thurs 3/24 – Pascal, “The Wager”

Week 11

Tues 3/29 – Anthony Flew, “The Presumption of Atheism”

Thurs 3/31 – Alvin Plantinga, “Is belief in God properly basic?” **(Paper 2 Prompt Released)**

Unit 5: God, Ethics, and the Meaning of Life | Two Theistic Views, Two Secular Views

Week 12

Tues 4/5 – A Thomistic Account: Eleonore Stump & Norman Kretzman, “Being and Goodness,” (God is the fullness of being and goodness, acting virtuously is the fulfillment of our being, of our human nature)

Thurs 4/7 – A Divine Command Account: Philip L. Quinn, “The Divine Command Theory” (The morally good is what God commands.)

Week 13

Tues 4/12– Secular Ethics: Christine Korsgaard, “The Authority of Moral Norms” (Morality based just on rationality, no God required)

Thurs 4/14– Secular Ethics: David Gauthier, “Morality and Self-Interest” (“Morality” based on self-interest) **(Final Exam Questions Released; Paper 2 Due)**

Week 14

Tues 4/19 God and Meaning: Susan Wolf, “The Meaning of Lives” (Meaning, no God required); William Lane Craig, “The Absurdity of Life without God” (No meaning without God)

Thurs 4/21 - Final Reflections

Final Exam: **Due at the end of Exam Week**

Reflection Paper 2: **Due at the end of Exam Week**